

## MISS HELEN HAY'S POEMS.

## AN UNPREMEDITATED STRAIN OF STRENGTH AND CHARM.

SOME VERSES. By Helen Hay. 18mo. pp. 72. Chicago and New-York: Herbert S. Stone &amp; Co.

There is nothing more engaging about Miss Hay's verse than its originality. The tone is unforced. Not only in its brevity, but in the fulness and freshness of each note struck within its scale, this collection of poems impresses us as having formed itself naturally, out of sincere feeling and a spontaneous impulse to say something, rather than out of any love of metrical exercises for their own sake. Such an unpremeditated strain is always rare, but it is rarest of all in first books of poetry, which give us, as a rule, small substance and much art. Miss Hay has art, but she also has emotion, and a sensitive, imaginative way of looking at things. Hence her themes—derived in the first place from a sympathetic outlook upon life and nature, and from an eager appreciation of the beauty in both—supply not only the occasion but the vitality of her verse, and she secures a perfect unity of matter and style. Witness the following poem, which seems to us to reach a high level in its fusion of a felicitous idea with vividly pictorial language:

**MIST.**  
Mist on the sea; like a great bird's pendulous wing,  
Broken and hushed, it trails on the face of the  
Down comes the sun, a red shot from a merciful  
slings.  
Burning its heart with a swift death as an end  
to the pain.

The pervading mood of the book is not inaptly illustrated by this poem, with its quick response to the sweet melancholy underlying so many of nature's loveliest phenomena. Such a mood embraces, obviously, a multitude of keys. With Miss Hay it seems to provoke an intonation which, if melancholy, is at the same time tender and without too urgent pathos. Thus in the lines addressed "To B. D." there is disclosed a consciousness of the burden of mystery, but no surrender to bitterness in its presence.

Broad-browed beneath a cloud of dusky hair,  
Her eyes are midnight seas that never sleep,  
But see beyond the dull world's heavy air  
The mystery of ages buried deep.

The faint, sweet shadows trembling round her  
mouth  
Lighten with youth and love the sphinx's face.  
And as she moves a soft wind from the south  
Floating, flower-laden, seems, so sweet her  
grace.

Alone she stands on idle mirth and tears,  
And keeps the white sails of her spirit furled.  
A girl, pure from the stain of years,  
An ancient Egypt, smiling at the world.

In the same spirit of serenity, at once poignant in its clear recognition of the tragedy in the subject and impersonal in its resignation to the futurity of speculation about its last significance, the "Trees of the Wilderness" is written.

The great bleak trees stand up against the sky,  
Lifting their naked arms in ceaseless prayer  
To the unspitting heavens that they might die,  
Rather than drag their weary lives out there.

Three starless nights the untold hours wear on,  
All awful phantom shapes afflict the wood,  
And morning light but brings the unwinning  
sun.  
To torture with its glare their solitude.

In those grim wilds no sweet-voiced bird will  
sing,  
No flowers will bloom within such trackless  
lands.  
Nor is there trace of any living thing,  
Save those gaunt giants, holding up their  
hands.

And when they fall, still round the unknown  
spot  
Howls the rough wind, till in the common  
They end the life which is, and yet is not,  
A riddle where no meaning shall be found.

From the examples we have cited it will be seen that Miss Hay is sure and eloquent in her choice of epithets. On occasion her easy command over verbal color leads to a touch brilliant but not absolutely convincing. The occasions, however, are few in number, so few that they are scarcely perceived, and the reader's confidence in her discreet use of her vocabulary remains unshaken. She draws upon it not only with taste, but with feeling. It is rich, and the warm picturesqueness which it communicates to the verse makes one think, sometimes, of Rossetti's jewelled, glowing lines. What is most important of all, Miss Hay seizes by instinct the music in a phrase, and her verse is genuinely lyrical. This, which is delightful enough in her treatment of the more elastic forms, is peculiarly pleasing in her sonnets. The vain efforts of scores of our contemporary singers have prepared us to expect inertia in that fateful collection of fourteen lines, yet we find a remarkably lyrical note in Miss Hay's sonnets, especially in the following:

**A WOMAN'S PRIDE.**  
I will not look for him, I will not hear  
My heart's loud beating, as I strain to see  
Across the rain forlorn and hopelessly,  
Nor starting, think 'tis he that draws so near.  
I will forget how tenderly and dear  
He made in coming hold his arms to me.  
For I will prove what woman's pride can do  
When faint love lingers in the darkness drear.

I will not—ah, but should he come to-night,  
I think my life might break thro' very bliss,  
This little while should be his to turn apart  
That all my soul might fall in golden light  
And let me die, so do I long for this  
Ah, love, "thine eyes" Nay, love—thy heart,  
Thy heart!

We would like to quote also the melodious "Days to Come," the delicately passionate "In the Mist," the rich, sonorous "Autumn," with its spirited opening—

The ruddy banners of the autumn leaves  
Toss out a challenge to the waiting snows—  
But these would leave us too little space for two  
Of the most poetic and most beautiful things in the book. The first is this terse but supple poem of interrogation:

**WAS THERE ANOTHER SPRING?**  
Was there another spring than this?  
I half remember through the haze  
Of glimmering nights and golden days  
A broken-pinnled birding-note,  
An angry sky, a sea-wrecked boat,  
A wandering through rain-beaten ways!  
Faint closer, yet—I have thy kiss!  
Was there another spring than this?

The second, than which Miss Hay has written nothing more spontaneous, more finished, more musical, more haunting, is the poem which follows:

**TO DIANE.**  
The ruddy poppies bend and bow,  
Diane! do you remember?  
The sun you knew shines proudly now,  
The lake still licks the breezes now.  
Your towers are fairer for their stains,  
Each stone you smiled upon remains.  
Sing low—where is Diane?  
Diane! do you remember?

I come to find you through the years,  
Diane! do you remember?  
For none may rule my love's soft fears,  
The ladies now are not your peers.  
I seek you thro' your tarnished halls,  
Pale sorrow on my spirit falls.  
Sing low—where is Diane?  
Diane! do you remember?

I crush the poppies where I tread,  
Diane! do you remember?  
Your flower of life, so bright, so red—  
She does not hear—Diane is dead.  
I see the sun, I see the stars,  
Where naught of her remains but stars.  
Sing low—where is Diane?  
Diane does not remember.

We relinquish the book with a keen sense of its quiet strength, its individuality and its pure poetic charm. It is chastened in its passion. But the passion is there, and the work stands out with a certain fine quality, a certain grace.

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